

Delta Halo

by Gunnerysarge

Category: Halo

Genre: Adventure

Language: English

Status: In-Progress

Published: 2006-02-06 10:17:08

Updated: 2006-02-06 10:17:08

Packaged: 2016-04-27 01:12:10

Rating: T

Chapters: 1

Words: 7,386

Publisher: www.fanfiction.net

Summary: The events of Delta Halo in novel form. First chapter now complete. Read and review!

Delta Halo

This is supposed to be a novel that follows the events of Delta Halo through the Master Chief's eyes, but I may include the Arbiter or characters like Johnson and Miranda if necessary. I'm trying to stay true to the game as much as possible, but I may stray in places (let's hear it for creative license!). This is just a test piece to check the response, remember, if you wanna see more then you gotta review. You guys make it happen.

Disclaimer-You know the drill.

So enjoy!

-_timthesoulmantaylor_

Update: I've now completed this chapter.

A/N: Italics are sounds, italics in speech marks are thoughts.

**So stand by your glasses steady,**

**This world is a world of lies,**

**A cup to the dead already**

**And hurrah for the next man who dies.**

-WWI aviator's drinking song

Prologue - Cairo Station

Master Chief Petty Officer SPARTAN-117 John stepped heavily off the

tram, pausing to contemplate the cheering Marines and darting hover-cams.

"You told me there wouldn't be any cameras."

His voice was low and dull, devoid of emotion. He hated attention; preferring to get on with a job with a minimum of fuss. Johnson looked at him, but couldn't read the expression behind the opaque visor.

"And you told me you were gonna wear something nice! Folks need heroes, Chief" he replied, a note of amusement in his voice. He ran his hand through his hair, and then replaced his cap.

"So, smile, would ya? While we've still got something to smile about?"

The Spartan said nothing, but followed him through the blast door and onto the sprawling bridge of Cairo Station. Two guards in dress uniform snapped off crisp salutes, but he ignored them.

Applause filled the room, hundreds of naval personnel standing up to cheer the pair as they approached the dais where Lord Hood was standing. The Sergeant and Master Chief turned to face him and saluted. A small smile tugged at Hood's grim, craggy features.

"Gentlemen, we're lucky to have you back."

A junior officer stepped onto the dais, and whispered to him. The smile vanished and he turned away.

"Go ahead, Cortana."

A shimmering blue figure appeared on the pedestal before them. The Chief immediately recognized her, although she had changed a few of her features.

"Another whisper, Sir, near Io. We have probes en route."

The Admiral turned back, his face set.

"I apologize, but we're going to have to make this quick."

For a moment, the Master Chief wondered whether he should be cheered up by this, but quickly banished the thought.

Cortana turned to the towering Spartan, head cocked in contemplation.

"You look nice."

"Thanks." John's mouth twitched under his helmet.

"Thank you" the Sergeant replied simultaneously; with a grin.

Lord Hood faced Johnson, a gleaming medal in his hand

"Sergeant Major, the Colonial Cross is awarded for acts of singular daring and devotion, for a soldier of the United Earth Space

Corps."

"Thank you, Sir."

The Sergeant made eye contact with Hood as he pinned the medal to his chest; then stepped back respectfully. A young woman, clad in officer's uniform, strode onto the dais. She snapped to attention, and saluted. John remembered her as Miranda Keyes, the daughter of Captain Keyes. She had scaled the ranks of the UNSC Navy remarkably quickly, and already commanded a small frigate, the In Amber Clad.

Hood turned to her, his face solemn.

"Commander Miranda Keyes. Your father's actions were in keeping with the highest traditions of military service. His bravery in the face of impossible odds reflects great credit, upon himself, and the UNSC. The Navy has lost one of its best."

Miranda took the proffered medal in her hand, but her face tautened as she fought back a small sob. Their reverie was broken as klaxons sounded off throughout the stations.

"Slipspace ruptures, directly off our battle cluster."

Cortana turned to the huge windows, one hand on her temple. Lord Hood glanced at her.

"Show me."

Cortana tapped her forehead, and a display flickered on, showing attack vectors for the Covenant vessels.

"Fifteen Covenant capital ships, holding position just outside the killzone."

A loudspeaker crackled as it received an incoming transmission.

"This is Fleet Admiral Harper. We are engaging the enemy."

Lord Hood paused for a moment, deep in thought. His face suddenly hardened, and John could see the resolve.

"Negative, Admiral. Form a defensive perimeter around the cluster."

Without turning from the screen, he spoke to Commander Keyes.

"Commander, get to your ship, link up with the fleet."

"Yes sir."

She jumped off the dais, beckoning to her bridge crew to follow her. Five armed guards broke ranks to escort them to the docking hatches, drawing their M6C sidearms as they went.

"You have the SuperMAC, Cortana. As soon as they come in range, open up."

"Gladly."

Cortana disappeared from the pedestal in a blur of light.

As his bridge crew rushed to their stations, Lord Hood tapped his chin. The display bothered him.

"Something's not right. The fleet that destroyed Reach was fifty times this size."

His musings were interrupted by a sensors analyst, who was frantically scanning his console.

"Sir, additional contacts! Boarding craft, and lots of 'em!" His voice cracked with panic.

"They're going to try to take our MAC guns offline, give their capital ships a straight shot at Earth." Hood said slowly.

He finally managed to tear his eyes from the display.

"Master Chiefâ€¦defend this station."

John could feel Hood's eyes boring into him through his faceplate.

"Yes, Sir." He turned to Sergeant Johnson.

"I need a weapon."

"Right this way..."

They both strode off the dais and through the blast doors, heading for the nearby arms station. Marines fell in behind them, leaving Hood alone with his bridge crew. He turned back to the display; the Covenant vessels were now inside the killzone. Through the bay windows he saw several Longsword fighters lance overhead, two cruisers in the rear. A small smile crossed his face as the SuperMAC began its warmup sequence.

Marines surged into the armory; pulling sidearms and rifles from the wall-mounted racks. The red alert lights on the walls gave their faces a blood red tinge. The Spartan chose a pair of SMGs and a BR55 rifle; quickly sighting and loading them. The Sergeant wasn't satisfied with them though; instead he levered open an olive-green crate and lifted out a portable M247 GP .30 caliber machine gun. The PA speakers crackled to life.

"Alert. Boarders inbound."

Johnson fiddled with the radio in his headset

"How's it going, Malta?"

"Stand byâ€¦they're latched! Check your targets, watch the crossfire. They're in standard formation; little bastards up front, big ones in back. Good luck, Cairo."

Johnson beckoned to the Marines, and they moved through the blast

door into an open atrium, with a huge pressure-seal door at the end of it.

There was a collective sound of safeties being clicked off, and a coarse scraping as Johnson unfolded the .30 cal. A feral smirk covered his face, what his Marines called his "shit-eating grin". There was a sound of claws on metal, then the scraping of heavy equipment. The Covenant evidently had plasma cutters on the other side of the pressure-seal door, scoring fracture lines in the Titanium-A alloy. They would then attach a plasma charge to the door and blow it out in a cloud of shrapnel. The plasma cutters filled the room with an eerie hissing; and the door's centre began to glow, changing from a dull orange, to red, then to white.

"Field of fire on that bulkhead. Soon as that door opensâ€¦let 'em have it!"

Chapter 02 - Home Field Advantage

The Master Chief could feel the tension of the Marines surrounding him, although none of their faces showed it. The hiss abruptly ceased, and the glow died away. Then, seconds later, a plasma charge detonated and the weakened door exploded inwards in a blizzard of shrapnel. The hatchway was instantly filled with an inferno of sizzling plasma and the enraged howls of the Covenant troops. The Master Chief let loose with both SMGs, hosing the doorway in a lethal spray of lead, but was forced to drop when a smattering of plasma fire drained his shields. Grunts screamed in terror and pain as the Sergeant's chattering .30 cal scythed through the invaders. Bodies began to pile up against the door, lying in a pool of fluorescent blood. The Marines were taking cover behind the computer consoles on each side of the room, but still keeping up a sustained wall of fire.

"Can't get a clear shot!"

"They're everywhere!"

"More where that came from, amigo!"

"Move, doggone it, MOVE!"

One Marine was hit by an overcharged shot that burned away most of his torso. Another was hit in the face by an oncoming Elite. The blow snapped his neck and flung him against a wall. But the enemies' ranks were thinning.

"GO GO GO!"

"Take him out, Marine!"

"Target down!"

Two Elites appeared on a catwalk, preparing to dive into the melee. The first one was killed in seconds as three Marines raked it with fire. The other landed right in front of a Marine; bringing its scaly arm up to strike. The Spartan was on him in seconds, driving his M-7 SMG into its mouth and blowing its head open.

The enemy force defeated, the only sounds were the panting of the

Marines, and the thump of the Elite's corpse on the deck plates.

"This is not a drill. I repeat, this is not a drill." The PA was still intact.

"_No_ _shit",_ John thought.

Down the corridor, a small group of covenant had set up a flimsy blockade behind some overturned crates. The commanding Elite looked at their work. "_Pitiful"._ His thoughts were broken by one of the grunts running down the short hall towards them.

"See! Bad thing! Demon! DEMON!" it squealed.

The Elite's mandibles went slack with fear, and then human fire was lancing down the corridor towards himâ€|

The covenant slaughtered, the Master Chief barely gave then a second thought as he waded over the alien corpses. Passing a slightly nervous looking Marine manning a .30 cal, he moved up the stairs and into one of Cairo Stations many rec areas. A few raised porches and planted palms littered the room. But now a firefight raged below. He threw one SMG to the ground, and hefted a plasma rifle in his second hand. The PA blared again.

"All personnel, brace for impact."

The station shuddered violently. Without another thought, he leapt off the balcony and into the battle below.

Miranda and her crew, along with the guards, were sprinting through the bowels of Cairo Station, dodging through little known maintenance accesses and cargo bays to avoid the worst of the alien boarders. They were making good time, but Miranda knew it couldn't last. Eventually the spreading covenant would cut them off, and then god only knew whether they would be able to overpower them.

Meanwhile, the Spartan had reached the first hangar bay. The door opened onto a large balcony spanning one edge of the hangar, littered with crates and a few personnel. He quickly ducked behind one to assess the situation. One covenant boarding craft had bored through the glass of the hangar doors, and was spilling waves of aliens into the room. There were several Elites and grunts in each wave, and they were steadily pushing back the sparse human resistance. He reached for a pile of grenades left on the balcony, and began to lob them into the fight below. Screams of pain from the grunts reverberated around the hangar. The guttural voice of an Elite cut through their squeals; trying to rally them, but it was cut short as one of the Spartan's grenades threw a crate across the hangar and crushed him into a wall. Taking advantage of their confusion, he tossed away his plasma rifle, unslung his BR-55 and vaulted over the rail into the maze of crates below.

Ruso Qasonamee was the only Elite left from the boarding team. The rest had been efficiently slaughtered by the sage-armored human and his cohorts. Now he ducked between crates, desperately trying to outsmart the Demon and come up behind him. He paused for a moment, listening for the clunk of his armored boots. A faint hissing came from behind him. He spun around, but it was too late. The demon was

holding a primed plasma grenade. His first instinct was to quickly roll out of the way, but the demon had thrown the charge with blinding speed and accuracy. All he could do was watch as the blob of plasma latched onto his breastplate. The last thing he saw was the green human standing impassively, staring straight at him. "_May the Forerunners have mercy", _he thought, and then the world disintegrated in a flash of pure blue.

The Marine grinned at the corpse of a grunt, toeing it with his boot. He looked out through the windows at the Cairo's sister stations, and his grin grew wider as the tiny purple specks of boarding craft disengaged and fled for their mother ships.

"Hey, check it out" he drawled. "The Malta's already driven off its boarders."

The Master Chief turned to look, Cortana's voice cutting in through his helmet

"Malta, what is your status?"

The Defense Coordinator was ecstatic. "I don't believe it! They're retreating, we won!"

A second later a massive explosion tore through the Malta, disemboweling it and flinging debris everywhere like a colossal shotgun blast. The Marines watched, speechless as its SuperMAC snapped in two and tumbled into the atmosphere.

"This is bad, real bad." A Marine cut the silence.

The Cairo defense coordinator came over the speakers.

"Alert! Hostiles have secured the port bulkheads."

The Master Chief looked to the small band of Marines. They knew what he was thinking, and nodded silently. They moved to the pressure door at the end of the hangar and set up a field of fire. The door began to hiss and glow, just like before. It exploded inwards and the covenant surged through.

Plasma seared the air as the aliens blasted recklessly at the defenders. Two Marines fell in the blinding inferno. But one by one, the commanding Elite's small force was torn away until he was the only one left. The Elite charged, leapt over the crate in front of the small force and was met with a hellish hail of lead. His shield flickered out and he was minced to pulp by several SMGs. The Spartan dropped his spent SMG and grabbed two plasma rifles. He nodded to the Marines, and they moved through the corridor into the next hangar. Another boarding craft had pierced the hangar door and was depositing the second wave of troops. The only resistance was a handful of Marines holed up at the passage door. They had been pinned down by two light plasma turrets set up on the balcony above the bay. John pulled out his BR-55 and scoped out the opposition. The enemy numbers were high, plus God knows how many more in the boarding craft. This was going to be one hell of a scrap. He primed a grenade, and let fly.

Miranda's high security clearance had allowed them to take a winding route, avoiding the worst of the covenant boarders. But they had

finally run out of time, and were holed up behind a makeshift barricade. Covenant were swarming down the hallway, straight into their field of fire. They were holding their own, but only just. The armed guard next to her yelled into his helmet radio.

"We need reinforcements, ASAP! The Covenant have cut us off before the airlocks! We need help now!"

An instant later, an overcharge hit him in the face, throwing him to the ground. Miranda desperately tried not to retch at the stench of charred flesh, and just managed it. In a brief fit of rage, she drew her M6C sidearm and emptied the magazine blindly down the hall, rewarded by the dying squeal of a grunt. She crouched again to reload, all the while praying for reinforcements.

John had lost track of the Covenant he had killed. All but two Marines were dead, and he was standing right in front of the boarding craft with a plasma rifle in each hand, blasting away. And finally, there was only one alien left. Unfortunately, that alien happened to be an Elite in gold armour with a plasma sword. They stood for a moment; eyeing each other. The Master Chief with his back against the wall and two rifles low on power, and the Commander, in the boarding craft hatch with a thrumming energy sword. The Elite charged. John clamped down on the rifle triggers, hosing the Elite with everything he had. The Marines fired too, pouring SMG fire into it, but they were quickly forced to cease fire to avoid hitting the Chief. The Elite's shield sparked and hissed, but didn't go down. The rifles were suddenly hot in his hand, and he threw them aside. It was too late for his BR-55; he was on his own now. Suddenly the Elite was on him, swiping vertically in an attempt to slice him in half. He sidestepped, pirouetted neatly on one foot and dropped, delivering a bone-shattering roundhouse kick. There was a double crack as the Elite's leg bones snapped in half and he keeled over, arms flailing in a futile attempt to stay vertical. He dropped his sword and lay gasping, helpless on the deck plates. John picked up the sword and stared down at his defeated foe. And with one thrust of the sword, put it out of its misery. He realised one of the surviving marines were standing next to him, staring at the decapitated alien.

The other had his face pressed against the glass of the hangar doors; watching in fear as the alien ships disengaged and fled the Athens.

"Uh oh. Hey guys, they're leaving the Athens."

John looked up just in time to see another massive explosion tear the station apart from the inside.

"_Waitâ€|The inside?"_

Lord Hood came over the comm. "Cortana, assessment!" he snapped.

"That explosion came from inside the Athens. Same as the Malta. The Covenant must have brought something with themâ€|a bomb."

Lord Hood didn't even hesitate.

"Then they sure as hell brought one here. Chiefâ€|find it."

The Spartan looked around the hangar, his eyes coming to rest on a set of stairs descending into the floor. "_Bingo"._

Chapter 03 - Priority Shift

Cortana remotely cycled the door open, revealing a few grunts and one very surprised and terrified Elite. Before it could even unholster its plasma rifle, the marines had gunned down the grunts and the Chief had smacked it around the head with the butt of his BR-55.

It was only then that he noticed that the room was completely dark. He motioned the Marines to freeze, and looked around the room. Something wasn't right. He moved slowly along the middle, sticking to the shadows. Finally he reached the door at the other end. He pulled out the policed plasma sword. He had a hunch.

Aso Nasamee was feeling rather bored. He had been standing in front of this door for what seemed like units, waiting for some hapless enemy to appear. This place was dark, cold and stank disgustingly of humans. He decided there would be no fighting for him today, and deactivated his cloaking system.

Kssssh.

"_What was that? It almost sounded likeâ€|no! Impossible_!"

The door cycled open, and the last thing he saw was the glint of sage metal and the gleam of plasma. Then he was dead.

The Spartan pulled his sword from the alien's sternum and deactivated it. One glance at the corpse confirmed his first suspicion. The Elite had been equipped with a cloaking device. Then the adjacent door cycled open, confirming his second. They were operating in pairs. The Marines had noticed it too. They opened fire, raking the area. Suddenly a stream of plasma split the darkness. The Elite had given away his position. "_Stupid"._ Master Chief shot him three times, knowing it would be all he needed. The problem with their cloaking tech was that it was totally incompatible with their shielding. The first two shots hit, ruining its cloaking system. And the last shot pierced its neck.

The sounds of battle rolled down the stairwell and through the open door. It was Mst Sgt Gunns. And he was fighting two Elites. Alone. "_Shit". _John made a dash for the stairwell.

"Get the hell out of my armory, ya split-"

He was just opening the trapdoors, when there was a burst of plasma, the sound of metal hitting bone. Gunns yelled in pain and fell silent.

"_Shit"._

The Spartan burst out of the trapdoor, gun blazing. To the Elites, he must have seemed like a devil rising from Hell. He spotted an M-90 combat shotgun on a table and threw himself sideways, grabbing it by the slider and pumping it in one fluid motion. He pointed the gun around the edge of the table, pulled the trigger and ripped apart one Elite's lower half. As the other Elite goggled at his shredded comrade, John popped up from behind the table and fired again. The

high-grain shell spat a cloud of buckshot in its face, depleting its shields and turning it to mince.

While the Marines behind him set to work cleaning out the weapon racks, John grabbed another box of shells and left his deactivated sword on the table. Hopefully ONI could analyze it later. For now, he'd keep his BR-55. He also took a moment to remember Gunns. Years of war had dulled the pain of loss, though there was still a faint twinge of remorse. He banished the thoughts - now wasn't the time. The armory opened into another rec area, which connected to the hall leading to the airlocks.

"Hang on, everyone!" The Cairo Defence Coordinator came over the PA.

The station shuddered again, an unnecessary reminder that there was no time to waste.

He pumped the M-90 and walked out of the armory. He knew the Master Sergeant would have approved.

"_This one's for Gunns"._

"Come and get it, ya ugly, split-chin bastard!" Sgt Johnson hurled abuse over the barricade as he loaded his BR-55. At the other end of the barricade, Miranda was forced to drop as a stream of blue plasma lanced over her head.

"You alright, ma'm?"

"I'm fine, sergeant."

The sarge popped up from behind the crate, doing his best to empty his magazine as quickly as possible.

"Learn some respect, ya scaly asshole!"

Blam.

Chik-Chack.

The M-90's deep bark reverberated around the rec area as the Spartan blasted away in a headlong charge down the middle of the rec area. The Marines hung back behind him, putting down covering fire with their BR-55s. Master Chief's first shot blew a grunt clean off his plasma turret. His second decapitated a charging red Elite. Another message from the Defense Coordinator came through his headset and his shielding alarm blared, but he ignored them.

Blam.

Chik-Chack.

Blam.

Chik-Chack.

Elites and grunts appeared in the far door. "_Fuck." _ He bowled a frag grenade, watching it ricochet off the far balcony and sail

straight under the feet of the leading Elite. It exploded, throwing a cloud of smoke, debris and alien gore across the doorway.

"_Perfect."_ There was the comforting hum of his shield powering up again, and he charged the doorway.

The Spartan burst through the smoke, sweeping the stairs. An Elite appeared, right in his face. It was about to roar a challenge, but John cut it off with a well placed shell.

"Leader dead, leader dead! Run! Run!"

"Ahh! Demon!"

The few remaining grunts turned to run, but the Marines mowed them down, as well as putting a burst into a light plasma turret at the end of the staircase. It exploded in the grunt's face, killing it.

They moved up the stairs onto the balcony. The far door opened, revealing another group of grunts and an Elite. John pulled his BR-55, and the Marines dropped into a classic firing stance. The Elite loosed a long burst of plasma. It tore through his shields and carved a molten furrow out of the armour's left shoulder plating. But he kept firing, knowing that the Elite's shields were about to fail. The grunts turned to run and were quickly shot down. Voices floated down the corridor. It sounded likeâ€|Johnson; and Miranda, as well as their escorts. They rounded the corner.

Right before the airlocks, Sergeant Johnson, Miranda and what remained of their escort were holed up behind a crate barricade. Alien corpses were piled deep across the floor in front of them; and even more were rounding the L-shaped corridor.

"Come on Chief, this way!" Johnson beckoned to him.

"I was almost on board when they showed up." Miranda was crouched behind the barricade, a captured plasma pistol in her hands. She seemed fine, but the wall behind her was pocked and scorched from a rapid-fire plasma weapon.

Johnson was wearing his 'shit-eating-grin' again, his fighting spirit obviously buoyed by the appearance of half a ton of green death.

"Don't worry ma'm, we're on it!"

Miranda stood up and surveyed the corpses piled across the floor.

"Thanks Chief, I owe you one."

Johnson reloaded his BR-55. "Get going. I'll cover the commander." He disappeared after Miranda.

The airlock pressure door stood at the end of the passage. From there he would have to get through the cargo storage area in vacuum, through another airlock into Portside Shipping and down the main freight elevator. From here he would have to exit out another airlock and across the MAC's recoil arm. He could then get into the elevator leading down to the MAC fire control room. It was going to be a tough

haul. It had been a long time since he had done any zero-gee combat and his skills were probably rusty. Suddenly Mendez's voice rang through his head.

"_Never doubt your skills. In a combat situation, they may be all you have."_

And with this timely piece of wisdom he stepped in, cycled the airlock and entered the harsh vacuum of space.

Chapter 04 - Authorized Personnel Only

A lone green figure dodged between cargo containers, trying to avoid the pair of aliens hovering above him. This was the first time John had seen Elites equipped for low-gee maneuvering, and he had to admit, they were skilled. But even with their sophisticated thruster arrays, they still had nothing on him. Blue plasma sliced past his helmet, eerily silent in the vacuum.

"Sir, boarders have breached the fire control centre. They have a bomb." Cortana's voice cut through his radio, her voice grim.

"Can you defuse it?" Hood replied.

"Yes, but I'll need the Chief's help to make contact with the detonator."

"Chief, get to the bomb, double time! Cortana, prioritize targets and fire at will."

The voice of a Longsword section commander came over the radio.

"First echelon, you're with me, blanket those cruisers, take 'em out one by one. Second echelon, keep those carriers busy."

He had nearly reached the Portside Shipping airlock, and he had no plans to have these aliens chase him across the station. It was time for action. Quicker than the eye could follow, he spun to face the marauders. A primed plasma charge flared blue, leaving his hand in the same instant. It flew blindingly fast, latching onto one Elite's thigh. It exploded silently, the radiation frying the Elite and shorting out the thruster's advanced electronics. His wingman unleashed two streams of molten death at him, but his aim was shaky. The Chief had no such concerns-he pulled his BR-55 and opened up. Twelve rounds of KAT 9.5mm later, the Elite was drifting, limp in a cloud of his own blood. John cycled the airlock access and disappeared back into the huge bulk of Cairo Station.

The airlock opened into a cavernous room, with a huge freight elevator traveling down a steep incline to another airlock. A few Marines were standing next to a titanium-A shield, watching for any aliens trying to breach the airlock. A faint humming, buzzing sound emanated from the elevator shaft. A second later the Drones were upon them.

Strange, insect-like creatures flew up and out of the elevator shaft. He had never seen any Covenant species similar to these creatures. Although they were taller than the Spartan, they seemed spindly and unarmoured. They buzzed around the room, eventually settling on the

ceiling and walls and throwing plasma pistol fire straight at them. The cavernous room echoed with the rattling of BR-55s and the hissing of plasma, mixing with the battle chatter of the Marines and the aliens' harsh screeching. Three bursts each and the insects would fall from the ceiling and thump to the floor in a spray of tan-colored blood. A Marine fell screaming and writhing to the deck as plasma fire thudded into his body. He shuddered once and was still. The PA blared, but the Spartan paid it no heed.

"Registering all hostile vessels inside the kill zone." Cortana said over his comm, her satisfaction evident. "Thirteen cruisers, two assault carriers. I'm going loud!"

The drones dead, John lowered his weapon and looked towards the massive bay window. The SuperMAC's massive rail slide slowly ascended to the cannon's muzzle, and then slammed back to its base. A massive MAC round burst forth, the slug of molten ferric-tungsten lancing up to meet the Covenant fleet high above. The humming of the rising elevator reached his ears. More squid-chins, coming up.

The sound of metal connecting with flesh, and the last Elite dropped to the elevator floor. He stepped over to a small pedestal, and pressed his hand to it. The panel flashed red, and the elevator began to descend. Cortana's voice was in his helmet again. She sounded anxious.

"Not a lot of time left on the clock, Chief!"

"The carriers are breaking through, Sir! They're heading straight for the Cairo!" Admiral Harper was frantic.

"Cortana! Concentrate your fire on the first carrier." Lord Hood said calmly. "Admiral, do what you can against the second!"

"Everyone, form up, follow my lead!"

Through the bay window, John could see the massive bulk of the assault carrier slide by dangerously close; like a cruising shark.

"The first carrier completely ignored us, Sir!" Cortana said "Blew through the Malta's debris field and headed straight for Earth!"

The comm fell silent again. The elevator shuddered to a stop, and John pulled his M90, hefting two frags in his left hand. The airlock door ground open and the Spartan let fly.

The double explosion shredded the entire group of aliens, painting them across the walls of the airlock in swirls of blue and purple. He stepped nonchalantly across their corpses, stopping only to police a few clips from a fallen ODST. The titanium pressure door sealed behind him, and a faint hissing reached his ears as the lock depressurized. The door opened, and the gunmetal machinery of the SuperMAC's loading arm stretched out in front of him. The Y-shaped loader pivoted on a small structure jutting out from the platform the MAC rested on. Three thruster-equipped aliens had set up a light plasma cannon on this small structure, giving them a height advantage and a view over the whole arm. The Elites caught sight of him and the turret opened up, the lance of energy strobing almost lazily towards him in the vacuum. It seemed to suddenly speed up in the last few

seconds before it splattered across his shields, setting his HUD flashing red and beeping insistently. He ducked out of sight in the small alcove left by the pressure door, and began to form a plan as plasma flashed into the plating around his boots.

The distance between the airlock and turret was well over the BR-55's recommended range. Even with the 2x scope engaged, the task would have been more suited to an S2 sniper's rifle. There was only one solution - he had to get closer. The loading arm, however, was devoid of any cover except for a few crates immediately next to the airlock. It was also pivoting up and down constantly. His only course of action was to lure two of them into range of his BR-55 and dispose of them. Then he would make a headlong rush towards the turret's 'dead zone', hoping his suit was not compromised. It was time for action. He made a dash for the nearby crates, hoping the Elites would take the bait. Two small shapes ignited their thruster packs and buzzed towards him.

"_Perfect."_

"_Threeâ€|twoâ€|oneâ€|go!"_

The Spartan began his charge across the MAC arm towards the turret. The Elite swung it around and pulled the trigger, sending a finger of blue sweeping out towards him. It washed over him, wiping the shield bar and pocking his suit. John was helpless. His suit would be torn open, and he would be flayed alive by the vacuum of space. The plasma was nearly on himâ€|and missed! The energy disappeared harmlessly over his head. The MAC arm had pivoted downwards at the last second, bringing him below the turret's dead zone and into safety. He continued up the right fork as the arm rose again, allowing him to get behind the turret and take it out. A frag under the alien's feet, and it was all over. Until another two Elites hovered out from under the MAC's rail slide assembly.

He threw the now empty BR-55 aside and retrieved the fallen Elite's dual plasma rifles. Two flashing beams of emerald connected alien and human, lasting only seconds before the rifles overheated, and the Elites were floating corpses. He pushed one aside, and strode into the elevator, descending into the bowels of the SuperMAC's machinery. Cortana's voice came over his comm.

"Just so you know there are quite a few Elites guarding the bomb. You may need to get creative."

"_Figures."_

Chapter 05 â€" Return to Sender

The doors hissed open and the lone figure launched himself out of the door. His reflexes quick as lightning, he was safely out of sight before the boarding party could open fire. The square room had balconies running around two of its sides, with a bay window at one end, and a bare bulkhead at the other. The SuperMAC's breech and its attendant machinery; ringed with maintenance catwalks nearly bisected the room. What he had seen on the way troubled him. Five well-armed Elites all clustered around a massive, spiked, pickle-shaped bomb. It was purple, with a small holo-pad that was flashing an ominous red. There was no time to waste - he had to get to the bomb.

Qso Wozomee, one of the newest recruits in the boarding party stalked quietly towards the Demon's hiding place. Oh yes, the prophets would reward him richly for this. He would be honored and feted throughout the Covenant. He would have anything he desired. The plasma charge in his hand would fuse to the dreaded green amour, and he would be no more. He prepared to dive forwards and fling it into his hiding spot. But before he could, the human popped up from his crate, holding some sort of weapon in its hands. It barked once, so loud the noise seemed to split his eardrums. Something kicked him hard in the chest and threw him to the ground; so hard it seemed as if it had snapped him in two. He would have covered his ears in pain, but both his hands were occupied in the futile gesture of trying to stem the horrendous bleeding from his torso; and holding in his vital organs. He died with purple blood pooling before his eyes and his shield warning siren beeping pointlessly in his ringing ears.

John charged, aware his advantage was spent. Scooping up an alien grenade from the corpse in front of him, he lobbed it hard. It latched onto a surprised red Elite, illuminating his terrified features in azure blue light before it fried him. The group of Grunts next to him were just as unfortunate. Another two Elites found themselves on the wrong end of the Spartan's M-90. "_Four down, three to go."_

There was the rattle of twin needlers off to his left and he had to duck behind the alien bomb to avoid becoming a pincushion. He checked his M90: four rounds left. Pulling out his two plasma rifles, he hosed the area with fire. The rattling promptly ceased. A grunt appeared from behind a crate, firing his plasma pistol ineffectively. He dispatched it with a quick burst then threw the empty plasma rifles away. The bomb's holopad was flashing faster now, signaling it had entered final countdown. There was now only one Elite left. It stepped out of cover; its hands seemingly empty, as if it was surrendering. But the Spartan knew better. For the Elite's armor was pearlescent silver. And the object concealed in its grip, was the hilt of a plasma sword.

The sword ignited with an evil hiss, static dancing up and down its glowing blade. John knew he was in trouble now. He was dangerously low on ammo with his remaining weapon and his grenade pouches were empty. The Elite began to advance, slowly, menacingly. His shotgun barked, once, twice, three times. His adversary's shielding glowed and hissed, but stubbornly held. The Spartan slowly backed up across the floor and onto the breech's maintenance catwalks. The Elite suddenly made his move, dashing up the catwalk towards him with sword swinging. He dodged the blow, painfully aware of the deadly machinery right next to him that could crush him easily if he were to get caught in it. "_Deadly machineryâ€¦|_"

He aimed a punch at the alien's chest, but his foe danced around it easily. The cannon's breech was moving behind him now, preparing to bring another shell to the barrel. He knew what to do. Barely dodging another blow, he threw himself sideways; landing crouched on the adjacent catwalk. The alien stepped slowly onto the track, intent on his prey, his mind closed to any distraction. John lifted the M-90; shooting him with his final shell. His enemy stumbled from the impact, his shield glowing around him. A millisecond later the breech slammed back to the barrel with the force of a locomotive. The Elite's last enraged roar was cut off by the sickening sounds of snapping bones and crushed flesh, purple blood oozing out from under

the closed breech.

He leapt lightly off the catwalk and returned to the bomb. Cortana's purple form coalesced on a holo-pedestal next to the bomb.

"Me. Inside your head. Now."

He ran his hand over the pedestal, the familiar feeling of ice-cold mercury coursing through his brain as the AI uploaded herself into his armor. He stepped over the bomb and held his hand over the activation pad. It beeped softly, and turned a neutral blue. The Master Chief felt relief wash over him.

"How much time was left?"

"You don't want to know."

"Cairo, this is In Amber Clad." Miranda said urgently "The carrier's shield is down. I'm in position and ready for immediate assault."

Lord Hood was adamant. "Negative, Commander. Not against a ship that size. Not on your own."

John tuned into the Cairo's bridge comm.

"Sir. Permission to leave the station."

"For what purpose, Master Chief?" Lord Hood's voice was questioning.

"To give the Covenant back their bomb."

Hood didn't even hesitate.

"Permission granted."

He seized hold of two of the bomb's spikes, and began dragging the bomb across the floor towards the elevator. The spikes left a trail of sparks across the floor. He closed the door and began to descend towards the Longsword hangar below.

"I know what you're thinking, and it's crazy." Cortana said.

"Soâ€¦stay here?"

"Unfortunately for us both, I like crazy."

The door opened and he walked into the hangar. Through the glass-inlaid hangar doors he could see what seemed like most of the human fleet diving towards Earth. Hard on the tails of the marauding carriers, tiny comets of fire were traveling back and forth. The door controls were situated on a floor to ceiling pillar towards the back of the hangar. He stepped over to the red-tinged activation pad, smacking it with the side of his fist. The panel slid upwards and the EMRG EGRSS lever dropped down. He braced himself behind the pillar to avoid getting sucked out of the bay.

"Just one question. What if you miss?" Cortana's voice was

doubtful.

"I won't."

John yanked hard on the handle. The bay doors cycled open and the bay began to decompress. The bomb slowly scraped across the floor, and then picking up speed as it passed the pillar. He leapt out, grabbing hold of it spikes and letting it pull him out into space.

He was freefalling slowly towards Earth, North Africa stretching out below him. His target, the second assault carrier, glided below him. Its main particle beam cannon probed up into space. A Halcyon-class cruiser rocketed past, close below him. The particle beam hit it right in the belly. The ship was engulfed in explosions, and as he glided past behind it he could see electricity arcing around the engine stubs as they tried to relight themselves. A pair of Longsword heavy interception fighters blasted past, diving almost vertically towards the carrier. Their bombs left two lines of fire across the carrier's hide, opening a small rift in the armor. He slipped through and into the carrier's reactor area.

The reactor was a massive chamber, with a white plasma core held in suspension at its centre. It cast pure white light across the inner surfaces. He crawled hand over hand up the bomb to the holopad. Another wave of his hand and the pad turned red. Below him, there was another tear in the carrier's abused structure, revealing Earth outside. He twisted, flexed his legs and kicked off the bomb, aiming for the gap. He slipped easily through and was well away from the carrier when it detonated in a blinding explosion of emerald blue.

The _In Amber Clad_ glided under his position, matching trajectories. Inside the ship's cramped bridge area, Miranda and Sgt Johnson were huddled over a tac display, watching the Spartan's flight path. There was a hollow thud from above, as half a ton of man and armor collided with them.

"For a brick, he flew pretty good!" Johnson said amusedly

"Chief, get inside, gear up. We're taking this fight to the surface."

The _In Amber Clad_ banked hard to starboard, diving for the earth's atmosphere. Slowly the massive, sprawling grey bulk of New and Old Mombassa came into view.

Wipes brow. Phew. First chapter finished. Thanks for the reviews guys. Keep em coming! Don't expect another chapter for weeks, this took me ages. Sorry about the formatting, messed it up.

Stay cool,

Timthesoulmantaylor

End
file.